

Photo-portraits capture Newtown's quirky diversity from behind shop doors

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The quirky and eclectic personality of Sydney's iconic Newtown is captured in a vibrant collection of 50 photo-portraits in the free exhibition *Shopkeepers of Newtown: Photographs by Nic Bezzina*, opening at the State Library of NSW from 1 November 2014.

The exhibition features a colourful cast of shopkeepers, including fetish fashion creators, food designers and retro treasure merchants, accompanied by revealing stories from behind the counter.

Captured over five years from 2009 to 2013, Nic Bezzina's collection of photo-portraits was inspired by his love of the suburb's alternative spirit and a desire to create a reportage style local snapshot for future generations.

"Newtown was my home for 10 years. I was drawn by its quirky nature and wanted to preserve a record of the fascinating individuals running local independent businesses," says Mr Bezzina.

Among those featured is black-clad Heather Marsh of Reactor Rubberwear who reminisces about a customer determined to leave the shop to run down Enmore Road wearing a 'black rubber blow up Michelin Man body suit with a blow up hood and breathing hose'.

There's also the passionate Kristina Vesk from the Cat Protection Society which has been on Enmore Road for over 30 years. Photographed with several feline residents, Vesk praises the area's generous and tolerant community, describing Newtown as 'a place that welcomes those who might be marginalised elsewhere'.

Mr Bezzina said he felt that "part of the old heart of Newtown was disappearing especially with the sad passing of local identity Bob Gould of Gould's Books – his photograph is my favourite in the series. The suburb is under pressure from its own popularity and rising rents and already some of the shopkeepers I photographed have closed their doors."

According to Alex Byrne, NSW State Librarian & Chief Executive: "The State Library is focused on collecting, preserving and sharing the stories of our rapidly changing state and nation and Nic's unique portrait series, now part of the Library's extensive collection, provides a vital record of the diverse creative community of Newtown today."

The photo-portraits featured in the exhibition are drawn from Nic Bezzina's book, *Newtown Shopkeepers*, a 126-page book of 50 colour photographic portraits accompanied by 50 interviews. Available from the Library Shop.

Shopkeepers of Newtown: Photographs by Nic Bezzina is a free exhibition on show at the State Library of NSW, 1 November 2014 to 10 May 2015. www.sl.nsw.gov.au

For more information, interviews and images, please contact:
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